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C O N F I D E N T I A L DJIBOUTI 000037

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STATE FOR AF/E AND AF/RSA
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SECDEF FOR ASD VERSHBOW AND DASD HUDDLESTON
AFRICOM AND CJTF-HOA FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/01/19
TAGS: [MOPS](#) [MASS](#) [PREL](#) [PHSA](#) [DJ](#) [SO](#) [AU](#) [YM](#) [ER](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI: SCENESETTER ON SECURITY ISSUES FOR ASD VERSHBOW

REF: 10 DJIBOUTI 31; 10 DJIBOUTI 3; 09 DJIBOUTI 1247
09 DJIBOUTI 1205; 09 DJIBOUTI 1152; 09 DJIBOUTI 1035; 09 DJIBOUTI 919
09 DJIBOUTI 895; 09 DJIBOUTI 761; 09 DJIBOUTI 551; 09 DJIBOUTI 453

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Embassy, Djibouti; REASON: 1.4(A), (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Embassy Djibouti warmly welcomes Assistant Secretary of Defense Vershbow and his party to Djibouti. A stable, moderate Muslim ally, Djibouti not only hosts Camp Lemonnier -- the only U.S. military base in Africa -- but also key USG broadcasting facilities used by Arabic-language Radio Sawa and the Voice of America Somali Service, the only USAID Food For Peace warehouse for pre-positioned emergency food relief outside CONUS, and naval refueling facilities for U.S. and coalition ships. Situated between Somalia and Eritrea, and adjacent to the Gulf of Aden, Djibouti's key political-military concerns currently focus on providing diplomatic and military support to Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG), led by President Sheikh Sharif; as well as on countering the persistent threat from Eritrea's continued occupation of Djiboutian territory along their common border, and from ethnic Afar rebels suspected to have infiltrated Djibouti from training camps in Eritrea. In recent months, the Djiboutian leadership has also grown increasingly concerned about developments in Yemen, which is just 18 miles across the Bab-el-Mandeb strait. Despite the relatively small size of its armed forces (approximately 5,000), Djibouti is making significant contributions to promoting regional peace and security in the Horn of Africa: actively engaged in providing basic military training to Somali TFG recruits; monitoring Djibouti's border with Eritrea; recently completed hosting and participating with other critical regional partners like Rwanda and Uganda in the first large-scale field training exercise involving the African Union's East Africa Standby Force (EASF), also known as the East Africa Standby Brigade (EASBRIG); and has committed to send 450 troops to participate in the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). Bilateral engagement with Djibouti remains robust: construction of a USD 120 million New Embassy Compound is now underway, scheduled for completion in 2011; and the first resident defense attache (DAT) arrived in September 2009. In September 2009, the bilateral agreement on access to and use of Camp Lemonnier was renewed through an exchange of diplomatic notes between the USG and the GODJ, with no change in terms, for the years 2010-2015. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Djibouti has provided significant diplomatic and military support to the TFG in neighboring Somalia, a country with whom a majority of the Djiboutian population shares a common language and ethnicity. Djibouti was instrumental in garnering international support for TFG President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, and hosted UN-sponsored Somali reconciliation talks from May 2008 to January ¶2009. This "Djibouti Peace Process" culminated in President Sharif's inauguration at Djibouti's Kempinski Hotel in January 2009, in the presence of international observers (including the U.S. Special Envoy for Somalia). These efforts were opposed by Hassan Dahir Aweys, formerly head of the Asmara-based extremist wing of the Alliance of the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS), and now head of Hizb al-Islam.

¶3. (C/NF) The security conditions in Mogadishu have made strengthening military support of the TFG one of Djibouti's highest priorities (ref F). Djiboutian plans to assist with the military training of up to 1,000 TFG recruits have involved the most senior GODJ principals--including President Guelleh and the CHOD, Major General Fathi Ahmed Houssein. Foreign Minister Mahmoud Ali Youssouf has informed the USG that the GODJ provided at least two shipments of weapons to the TFG in May 2009 (IIR 6 830 010009). At the direction of President Guelleh, beginning July 5, the GODJ began airlifting TFG recruits from cantonment areas in Mogadishu to Djibouti for basic military training, using charter aircraft.

¶4. (C) Somali TFG Foreign Minister Mohamed Abdullahi Omaar has highlighted Djibouti's training of TFG recruits as a critical element in achieving the TFG's aim of training up to 3,000 recruits to form a new Somali army (ref G). The Djiboutian Armed Forces (FAD) trained approximately 463 Somali military recruits at the FAD's "President Gouled" Military School, its primary training center, located in Hol Hol, 45km southwest of Djibouti's capital. Training began in early July 2009 and was completed in mid-October ¶2009. FAD instructors provided the recruits with basic infantry training; live-fire training commenced July 26, 2009. Senior U.S. officials, including VADM Moeller, visited the Hol Hol site on July 12, 2009. CJTF-HOA delivered material items (including tents, cots, and water tanks) to Hol Hol, to support Djiboutian training efforts, and State Department Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) funds were used to backfill kit and equipment provided by the Djiboutians to the Somali trainees.

¶5. (C) Separately, French forces in Djibouti (FFDJ) trained an additional 150 TFG forces at French facilities in Arta, approximately 40km west of the capital. Upon completion of their training in September 2009, these recruits were moved to Hol Hol for integration with the 463 TFG soldiers receiving training from the Djiboutian military. All the recruits returned to Somalia in October 2009. A second tranche of TFG recruits is also scheduled to be trained by the Djiboutian military, but there are no specifics currently available.

ACOTA

¶6. (C) In September 2009, Djibouti became the 25th African partner in the Africa Contingency Operations and Training Assistance (ACOTA) program. According to Djiboutian Foreign Minister Youssouf and the FAD, Djibouti is considering deploying a battalion of troops (approximately 400-450 troops) to Mogadishu, in support of

AMISOM (ref C). It has also discussed sending 4-5 mid- to senior-level officers to AMISOM as interpreters/advisors. The Djiboutian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has stated that after a review it has been determined that there is no legal impediment barring frontline states bordering Somalia to contribute forces. ACOTA moderated a Training Strategy Conference (TSC) in Djibouti from 11-14 January 2010 with Djiboutian civilian and military officials, to determine the way ahead for participation in AMISOM and other multilateral peacekeeping operations.

UNSCR SANCTIONS ERITREA FOR BORDER STANDOFF

¶17. (C) Despite condemnation by the international community (e.g., AU, IGAD, UNSC, LAS, OIC), the Eritrean military continues to occupy fortified positions on Djiboutian territory at Ras Doumeira, nearly two years after June 2008 hostilities. Djibouti reports 19 FAD troops remain missing in action, including a prominent colonel; coincidentally, Djibouti is holding 19 Eritreans as POWs. The ICRC reports that the 19 POWs in Djiboutian custody are in good condition; Eritrea has refused to acknowledge that it is holding any POWs from Djibouti (ref J). Approximately 30 per cent of Djibouti's relatively modest (5,000-strong) military remains deployed at the border with Eritrea; Djibouti's Prime Minister has publicly asserted that this continued deployment costs USD 5 million/month, a figure that IMF officials assess may be accurate. To help reduce the necessity of maintaining so many Djiboutian troops along the border, the USG has provided imagery-derived analyses of Eritrean troop locations at the border to Djiboutian officials.

¶18. (C) Djibouti also asserts that it has captured several ethnic Afar rebels who infiltrated Djibouti to conduct subversion, after being trained at camps in Eritrea (refs A, I).

¶19. (C) On the diplomatic front, Djibouti has sought international sanctions against Eritrea for its military occupation of Djiboutian territory, as well as for its support of al-Shabaab extremists in Somalia. On 23 December 2009, the United Nations Security Council passed Security Council Resolution 1907, imposing an arms embargo on Eritrea, as well as travel restrictions and a freeze on the assets of its political and military leaders.

CONCERN OVER YEMEN

¶10. (C) Over the past several months, GODJ leadership has expressed growing concern over developments in Yemen (ref B). Djibouti has a small ethnic-Yemeni population (less than 5 percent), is less than 18 miles from Yemen across the Bab-el-Mandeb strait, and sees frequent movement of people and goods between the two countries. In addition to fears they will be caught between two centers of extremism--Somalia and Yemen--the Djiboutians believe that Houthi rebels are also benefiting from Iranian assistance provided with the support of Eritrea. Djibouti is supportive of measures to reinforce Yemeni President Saleh's government and act against terrorist targets.

¶11. (C) Despite the security challenges posed by its immediate neighbors, Somalia and Eritrea, Djibouti hosted a large-scale field training exercise (FTX) on behalf of the African Union's East African Standby Force, from 30 November to 4 December 2009. The FTX involved approximately 1,500 troops as well as 400 support personnel. Participating countries (either sending troops or observers) included Djibouti, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, Ethiopia, Sudan, Comoros, and Seychelles. The EASBRIG military commander is

Brigadier General Osman Nour Soubagleh (one of four flag officers in the Djiboutian military). The GODJ received US, French, and other donor support for the FTX to include tents, sanitation equipment (e.g., portable toilets), and support for site preparations (ref H). A USG contribution of nearly \$2 million from the AFRICOM Combatant Commander's Initiative Fund was gratefully received by the Djiboutians and helped reinforce our security partnership (ref D). The FTX was completed successfully and the after action review is ongoing.

BILATERAL ENGAGEMENT TO STRENGTHEN MARITIME CAPABILITIES

¶12. (C) The Embassy manages a wide array of security assistance projects aimed at strengthening Djibouti's maritime capabilities, including:

- the provision of patrol boats to the Djiboutian Navy;
- the December 2008 completion of the USD 14 million FMF-financed Obock naval pier (approximately 75 km south of the strategic Bab-al-Mandeb Strait); and
- ongoing installation of an USD 8 million Regional Maritime Awareness Capability (RMAC), comprising AIS, coastal radar, and the establishment of an operations center for the Djiboutian Navy. The RMAC installation is scheduled to be completed 28 January 2010.
- In addition, the Embassy is coordinating with the U.S. Department of Energy's National Nuclear Safety Administration (DOE/NNSA) on a USD 6-10 million "Megaports" project to install sensors at the Port of Djibouti's new Doraleh Container Terminal, which will detect the transshipment of radioactive materials (09 DJIBOUTI 453). Construction is slated to begin in 2010.
- General Ward's participation in a July 30, 2009, ribbon-cutting ceremony with the Commander of the Djiboutian Navy, COL Abdourahman Aden Cher, marked the launch of a U.S. Navy harbor security unit at the Port of Djibouti to provide improved force protection to visiting U.S. ships. This concurrence was codified in a formal MOU signed between COL Cher and the Camp Lemonnier commanding officer (09 DJIBOUTI 449).
- In October 2009, a full-time U.S. Navy liaison officer (O-3 level) completed a three-month assignment to Djiboutian Navy headquarters--fulfilling a long-term request by Djiboutian Navy Commander, COL Cher, for a USN LNO. To date, the position has not been backfilled.

COUNTER-PIRACY HUB

¶13. (U) Djibouti continues to serve as a key hub for international counter-piracy operations, including the European Union's "Atalanta" naval task force, the NATO Standing Maritime Group I, Combined Task Force 151, and a historic overseas deployment by the Japanese military. The foreign ministers of Japan and Djibouti signed a bilateral status of forces agreement (SOFA) in Tokyo on April 4, 2009. Beginning on May 31, 2009, Japan deployed approximately 150 Japanese Self-Defense Force (JSDF) troops to Camp Lemonnier, to support two P-3C maritime reconnaissance aircraft conducting counter-piracy missions off the coast of Somalia. In

addition, Japan has deployed two destroyers to Djibouti for counter-piracy operations (09 DJIBOUTI 255).

¶14. (C) Japanese diplomats report that Japan seeks to establish its own military base in Djibouti, in the vicinity of Camp Lemonnier, due to plans for a long-term presence in Djibouti. According to Japanese contacts, strategic interests led to Japan's parliament revising the constitution to expand the Japanese contingent's rules of engagement; approximately 10 per cent of international shipping going through the Bab-al-Mandeb Strait is Japanese, including all of Japan's automobile exports to Europe. Djibouti and Japan have not yet concluded any new basing agreement, but consultations are ongoing.

CAMP LEMONNIER AGREEMENT RENEWED

¶15. (C) During a visit in mid-June 2009, DASD Huddleston verbally informed Foreign Minister Youssouf of the USG's intent to exercise its option to renew the May 2006 Implementing Arrangement, for access to and use of Camp Lemonnier (ref I). The May 2006 Implementing Arrangement (signed in Washington, DC, by then DASD Whalen) was due to expire September 30, 2010. However, it was extended in September 2009 for a five-year period (i.e., 2010-2015) "without renegotiation of terms or compensation" when the U.S. Embassy provided written notice in a formal diplomatic note to the GODJ. The GODJ accepted the extension with no change in current terms or compensation (ref E).
SWAN